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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 015749

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS: PHUM KDEM PREL SOCI CU

SUBJECT: ANTI-DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES CONTINUE IN CUBA

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Cuban regime agents continue to carry out "acts of repudiation" and other aggressive actions against pro-democracy activists, but to no greater or lesser extent than before the July 31 announcement of Fidel Castro's temporary withdrawal. Since then, at least five anti-dissident incidents have occurred, we learned August 8 in separate talks with eight activists. Apart from the August 6 march by the "Ladies in White," dissidents have organized only one event since the announcement: A few members of a small opposition group in Havana marched with placards and chants, but police quickly ended the protest and hauled the participants off to jail. The Ladies deny media reports that they aimed their August 6 appeal for the liberation of their political-prisoner relatives at Raul Castro. Streets in the capital remain quiet, possibly due to security-force mobilization. Several activists make clear they will not support Raul, and have passed on rumors of a power struggle in the Politburo between Raul supporters and Ricardo Alarcon.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Cuban pro-democracy activists continue to be subjected to "acts of repudiation" and other abuse by Communist militants, but the level of harassment does not appear to have changed since the GOC's July 31 announcement that Fidel Castro was temporarily stepping down. Since then, at least three acts of repudiation and two official police warnings have been carried out against dissidents. The most intense incident occurred in the city of Las Tunas, targeting Yamile Llanes, a Lady in White. On August 3, Llanes was home with her four children and seven of their friends when around 100 people approached the home, threw stones and threatened to burn it down, according to Miriam Leyva, an independent journalist and leading Lady in White. No one was injured. The other two acts of repudiation, held hours after the announcement, occurred in Havana and targeted Lady in White Gisela Delgado and Edel Garcia Diaz, one of the 75 peaceful activists detained in the March 2003 crackdown.

THREATS OF IMPRISONMENT

¶3. (C) Two State Security officials paid an August 4 visit to the home of dissident Michael de Miranda in Santa Clara, according to his father, Roberto de Miranda. The officials allegedly told him that if he continues to speak out as part of the Marti Youth Coalition (CJM), he will be imprisoned for between 12 and 18 months. The same day, police in the city of Urbano Noris (Holguin Province) took Walter Ben Guria of the Cuban Liberal Movement (MLC) to a police station, interrogated him for two hours and threatened him with

incarceration for "dangerousness," according to Leon Padron Azcuy, MLC president.

STREETS QUIET

¶4. (C) The capital, eight days after the July 31 announcement, remains calm on the surface. Apart from the August 6 Santa Rita march by the Ladies in White, dissidents have stayed out of the line of fire. Dissidents held a small protest on or about August 5 in the Havana neighborhood of Regla, according to Jorge Olivera, a writer and (freed) 75er.

Quoting a family member who lives there, Olivera said a few members of an obscure dissident group named "Sons of the Virgin of Regla" took to the street with placards and chants.

"But the police snuffed out the protest instantly, and took the participants off to jail." Overall, Olivera adds, "The terror is too much for people to go out and demonstrate."

"LIKE MOUNT SAINT HELENS"

¶5. (C) Edgard Lopez, head of the CJM, Cuba's most influential opposition youth organization, says the situation is volatile. "The streets are quiet, but Cuba is like Mount Saint Helens; it could blow at any time." He adds, "No one wants to be a martyr, but things happen." Lopez says most CJM members are keeping a low profile, for two main reasons: Soldiers armed with rifles have appeared in the streets, and State Security did a thorough job in recent weeks of meeting with dissidents and letting them know the GOC would have no qualms about throwing them in prison for the slightest infraction.

REGIME SPREADS WAR RUMORS

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¶6. (C) Stoked by incessant regime propaganda, the rumor mill circulates the idea that there may be an impending US-Cuba war. Ladies in White Soledad Rivas and Margarita Borges Candelario said August 8 this is one reason more people are staying off the streets. Roberto de Miranda says another factor is that with an increased police and informant presence in the streets, people are afraid they'll be detained if they appear in a group outside. De Miranda adds that more people are being stopped for random police checks since the July 31 announcement. Poloff repeated the President and SecState's messages to the effect that there is no US invasion in the offing.

"LADIES" DENY APPEALING TO RAUL

¶7. (C) Leyva says media reports were incorrect in stating that the Ladies in White appealed August 6 to Raul Castro to free their political-prisoner relatives. "We never mentioned Raul," she says. "We just demanded the release of the political prisoners, same as we have every Sunday since March ¶2003. The only thing different this time was that it was our first march since this provisional government was announced."

Reaction to the rise of Raul Castro has been varied, but most activists are wary. Says Lopez: "They say Raul is a pragmatist, but we can't accept his leadership; as a leader, he is as illegitimate as Fidel." Padron Azcuy says: "We're going to keep pushing for the release of political prisoners.

Would Raul free them? I don't think so." Says Roberto de Miranda: "There is a concealed happiness among the people," but this has less to do with Raul's rise than Fidel's demise.

POLITBURO POWER STRUGGLE ALLEGED

¶8. (C) Roberto de Miranda told Poloff August 8 that a former

fellow prison inmate named Roberto Rodriguez Acevedo, a former Interior Ministry official jailed for political crimes, stopped by for a recent visit. Rodriguez said two Raul loyalists -- Generals Abelardo Colome Ibarra and Leopoldo Cintra Frias - were engaged in a serious Politburo power struggle with National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, a civilian. We have heard this elsewhere, from military analysts and from retired Gen. Quevedo Perez, who made the assertion to a TV reporter in Miami, where he defected in 2003.

PARMLY